

DELIVERED AT PLYMOUTH CHURCH OF SHAKER HEIGHTS, U.C.C.

## **“All That – And Even More”**

GOSPEL READING: Matthew 11:2-11

Once again John the Baptizer becomes the subject in this week’s reading from the Gospel, though he is *in absentia*. At this point John is in prison. But John is becoming puzzled by what he has heard about Jesus, so he sends a delegation to Jesus to find out more. There is a hidden interchange going on in the question and answer between the delegates from John the Baptist and Jesus. John has raised the prophet Malachi’s question, about the “messenger of the covenant [who] is coming,” who is like “a refiner’s fire.” (See the first verses of Malachi 3) But Jesus answers with the prophet Isaiah’s answer, about the blind seeing and deaf hearing. (From chapter 29) John wants to know who Jesus is; Jesus responds by pointing to what he does.

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

MEDITATION:

Jesus administers a couple of eye tests, so to speak, in our Gospel reading for today. It’s his way of checking on vision.

First he tests the vision of the delegates who came from John the Baptist, now in prison. He asks them what they saw. Had they noticed what was going on around them because of his own presence in the world? Certainly big things were happening; no doubt about it! The blind were seeing, deaf hearing, lame walking, the dead living again, and the poor –

always the last, always at the tail end of everything – the poor finally having some reason for hope. “Go tell what you have seen,” says Jesus.

Then he asks the crowds that had gathered around him an eye test question. What had they noticed when they in turn had gone to see John the Baptist in the desert? “A reed waving in the breeze?” Not really. Not someone ordinary. “Someone dressed in royal robes?” No, not someone elegant. But perhaps (look a little more carefully, Jesus seems to urge them, look a little more closely) perhaps a prophet? Perhaps a speaker of truth? A messenger whose news can make a dramatic change possible in their lives? A bearer of God’s own word? Yes, a prophet. “That,” says Jesus, “and even more.”

But take this eye test one step further. Let’s examine our own vision. Consider how these questions apply to you and me. What do we see when we look with our mind’s eye at not so much John the Baptist, and Jesus, but one another? What do we see when we look with faith at the persons we encounter day by day, or at the faces of those who are part of our lives? More, I hope, than meets the eye. Not just what’s on the surface. Not only such things as the human frailty which affects all of us and can turn us all into reeds swaying in the wind, not only the pretension of fine clothes. But beneath the surface, the reality, the spirit, the gift, yes, the gift at the very core of another person’s life.

Our magnificent Sunday worship bulletin covers this Advent season have offered stunning evidence that some in our fellowship have wonderful creative abilities. By sharing their talents in this way they have let us look at them in new ways. They’ve let us see more than we might have seen otherwise. They’ve shown us that they are artists and poets, imaginers and creators, envisioners and inventors. All that – and even more.

But they are simply one example. Consider the gifts aglow in the hearts of others in our midst, and around us, and even people we meet in casual ways. What do you see? Truth tellers? Dream singers? Health givers? Peace bringers? Music makers? Nurturers? Co-creators? Children of God? All that – and even more!

In these days which lead up to Christmas we are on the verge of a tremendous mystery. Christmas brings the wonder of God with Us, “Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing,” the enfleshment of God. And that astonishing mystery impacts our lives and the life of the world through the further “mystery” the Apostle Paul celebrates: “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (*Colossians 1:27*)

Checking our vision today, what do we see in others? Reeds in the wind? Elegance? Imagination? Truth? Yes, all that – and even more. Even God’s glory, God’s gift, God’s love.